



## **PARTNERSHIP FOR STRONG COMMUNITIES**

A Safe, Affordable Home:  
The Foundation of Opportunity

### **Testimony to The Planning & Development Committee on March 14, 2014 by David Fink, Policy Director, Partnership for Strong Communities In opposition to HB5511**

Chairman Rojas, Chairman Osten, Sen. Fasano, Rep. Aman, Honorable Committee Members,

My name is David Fink, and I am the policy director for the Partnership for Strong Communities, a statewide housing policy and advocacy organization that supports state of the art solutions to end homelessness, create supportive and affordable housing and build strong communities across the state.

I am here to oppose, in the strongest terms, HB 5511 because it would render the 8-30g statute, which has helped create thousands of affordable and modest market-rate homes for workers and families across our state, totally ineffective. It would also strangle the successful and growing HOMEConnecticut program, which some of you know as the Housing Program for Economic Growth, that this committee was instrumental in creating.

You have heard/will hear opponents of the 8-30g statute complain today that it doesn't work, that it is burdensome, that it is a bad statute.

Their complaints couldn't be more wrong. 8-30g is effective in vital ways:

First, as mentioned, it has helped create thousands of homes for families and children in municipalities with good schools, abundant services and many job opportunities. For every person who cares about economic growth, closing the achievement gap and individual opportunity and responsibility, being able to live in communities that work best for your children and families is vital.

Second, municipalities aware of 8-30g's 10% threshold have worked to create affordable homes that they never would have tried to create if 8-30g didn't exist. Former Darien First Selectman David Campbell was quite frank when he told the Housing Committee that his town created more affordable homes -- enough to secure a moratorium -- because it wanted to avoid the provisions of 8-30g.

Third, in similar fashion, 8-30g has spurred many municipalities to embrace the HOMEConnecticut program as a way of proactively creating the types of affordable and mixed-income homes they need. Dozens of towns are actively engaged in HOMEConnecticut now. Without 8-30g, many would not have embraced -- and will not embrace -- HOMEConnecticut.

Most important, 8-30g opponents are misinformed when they contend that 8-30g demands significantly more mixed-income housing than they can possibly provide. The truth is that communities that HAVE tried have not only qualified for a moratorium allowed for under the statute but used that 3-year period to continue their efforts and attain an extension of the moratorium.

Significantly, the Town of Westport has been working over the last several years to achieve a moratorium and is now very close! Westport's efforts are only the latest evidence that the 8-30g statute works.

You also have heard/will hear towns say they can't produce more affordable units because they say they are "built out." You should know there is no such thing as "built out" or we'd never see a crane in densely settled municipalities. Cities and towns repurpose properties all the time.

You also have heard/will hear officials say their municipalities don't have the sewers or other infrastructure to support the density that allows affordability. Well, there are amazing new technologies that can support density when sewers are unavailable and which municipalities can explore. And if those technologies can't support density in their towns, I'd argue they don't have much too fear from 8-30g!

In the final analysis, towns that want to create a wider array of housing options on their own terms -- using HOMEConnecticut or any of a number of other tools -- can avoid pressure from 8-30g. Towns that don't try will be subject to its provisions.

But this committee should make no mistake: Connecticut is in dire need of more homes that are affordable to working class households, families, young professionals and Baby Boomers.

We have the 6<sup>th</sup> highest monthly housing costs in the nation, the 8<sup>th</sup> highest median home values and the 8<sup>th</sup> highest housing wage. 51% of all renters and 34% of owners spend more than 30% of their income on housing. That's bad for them and bad for the state's economy. Supply is the problem. We are 50<sup>th</sup> in units built per capita over the last decade (2003-'12). And what we've built is not what we need.

HB 5511 would make 8-30g ineffective, badly weaken HOMEConnecticut and mortally wound the effort to create affordable homes that our parents, our workers, our adult children and so many others so seriously need. In a state that has lost too many young adults in part because of extraordinarily high housing costs, in a state where 39% of all households spend more than 30% of their incomes on housing, in a dangerously aging state that must keep and attract young families to in turn attract new employers, this committee should not jeopardize the creation of housing we sorely need.

The stakes are too high. This bill would do more damage than you can imagine.